

Mr. BIDEN. I will do whatever the Senator would like me to do.

Mr. BURNS. I tell the Senator, I have a feeling we are not going to really get into the meat of this bill until after the policy luncheons.

If the Senator would like to open it up, say, with your statement at around 2:15, we might be able to arrange that. Until then, I would put the Senate back into morning business.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, if the Senator will yield, I would be happy to do that. But would I be able to appropriately ask unanimous consent that I be recognized first, unless the managers wish to be recognized, when we reconvene after our party caucuses?

Mr. BURNS. Let's hold up for a minute until we get some consultation.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, let me rephrase that. I ask unanimous consent that after the managers and/or either party leader I be recognized to make my statement on Kosovo.

Mr. BURNS. I have no objection.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BURNS. I thank my good friend from Delaware.

Mr. President, seeing no one to speak on this issue—and I think most everybody is awaiting the debate for this afternoon—I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be a period for the transaction of morning business until 12:30 p.m. today and that Senators be permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE DISASTER IN NEW MEXICO

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I note on the floor with me this afternoon is Senator BINGAMAN. We are both here to speak about the disaster and catastrophe that has occurred in New Mexico. I would like to speak maybe for 5 or 6 minutes, then yield to my colleague, and then come back and do a little more.

During my time in the Senate, which is now approaching 28 years, I vividly remember coming down and hearing Senators have to tell the Senate about a disaster of significant proportions in their home State. The Senator wanted to tell us about how bad things were and lay the groundwork for the Congress, the Government of the United States, to do what it must to help those who are victims in a disaster.

To tell you the truth, I have been to Los Alamos, oh, so many times over the last 28 years. Most of them have been very joyous occasions, when we met with some of the greatest scientists in the world, talked about some fantastic science, met some wonderful people, and saw a beautiful town up there in the mountains. It came into being when the United States of America decided a former boys' academy up there in the mountains would be the center around which we would develop our first atomic weapons. It was a closed city for a long time but a beautiful place.

Sure enough, never did I expect to see what I saw last Thursday when Senator BINGAMAN and I, the Secretary of Energy, and James Lee Witt, the head of our emergency disaster relief agency for the United States, and others flew out there. Then we helicoptered around. Then we drove the streets to see what was occurring.

Senator BINGAMAN took a little different tour than I. He saw some of the housing. I saw where they set up the headquarters to manage and operate things. So he will have some very vivid recollections of what he saw, of houses burned to the ground.

Essentially, it is, indeed, a very sad day when probably one of the greatest laboratories human beings have ever set up—in terms of great science, not just because of great buildings but because great scientists have lived there and worked—is surrounded by flames. Many people supported those most talented of Americans—and even some of our greatest friends from other countries have been there as part of America's research in atomic and nuclear weapons safety, responsibility, and reliability—to go there and see a ghost town as you drive the streets, with smoke on one side, fire on one side, a house burned down, your heart kind of goes out. A great deal of empathy pours from you.

We are very lucky, the Senate should know; even though over 44,000 acres have burned, something like 400 housing units have burned to the ground, and upwards of 25,000 people have been evacuated—many are returning now. Damage and fire are still going in some of the canyons—but, we are very grateful that in the canyons that are still burning there are not very many housing units in the path. The forest is still burning and will burn for a long time. Yet nobody died, nobody got seriously hurt. Two or three firemen were injured, as I understand it, and none of those was serious.

The fire is now no longer threatening the houses of the city of Los Alamos or of White Rock, the adjoining community. In some very miraculous way, none of the big administrative and research buildings of the laboratory was hit by this fire. It went around them and got some housing subdivisions, but only a few buildings of minor significance that are part of this enormous science complex were burned.

The houses that burned, burned right to the ground. All that is left is cement foundations, as Senator BINGAMAN will describe and perhaps show some pictures. If there were houses that had cars in the front yards, the cars were burned to a crisp. The metal is twisted and burned. In some places, you can see an icebox that is hanging over the vacuum that used to be sheltered by walls and roofs. The icebox just melted. It is no longer even noticeable. You cannot recognize it as being such. It is melted and completely different in form.

Essentially, all this was going on right around and close to a laboratory that does an awful lot of nuclear work, that has some compounds that are housed in cement bunkers so nothing can happen to them. And, sure enough, to this day there has been no radioactivity escape from any of these buildings and/or research facilities.

That is not just the Federal Government saying it. The New Mexico environmental department has monitored this. The greatest and best monitors from around the country are located there, and the ambient air monitors have indicated there is no radioactivity in the air. So now we have to start back up the path of trying to see how we can rebuild the lives of people there.

I am not going to go into detail other than to say we are beginning to move in the right direction. The laboratory personnel will begin to move in and see what is needed. In one of the communities, people are coming back. Parts of Los Alamos will be reoccupied soon. But I am sure Senator BINGAMAN and I will be asking the Senate, from time to time, to assist us, either with legislation that will direct how this should be handled, or certainly with money that will make the repairs and bring this facility back to where maybe we could say we will make it as whole as possible.

I want to close my first few remarks, and then yield to my friend, Senator BINGAMAN, by saying that right next to this forest, which surrounds Los Alamos, the Los Alamos property that belongs to the Department of Energy, is a national monument called Bandelier. It is rather renowned.

Both Senator BINGAMAN and I have had reason to work specifically for things to preserve and make the Bandelier National Monument a great and beautiful place. But it appears that in order to clear out that Bandelier forest a bit, because so much growth had accumulated and because of so many fallen trees and other things, that a planned burn took place. It looks as if